

Thomas Jefferson to Edward Rutledge, December 27, 1796, Draft, The Works of Thomas Jefferson in Twelve Volumes. Federal Edition. Collected and Edited by Paul Leicester Ford.

TO EDWARD RUTLEDGE J. MSS.

Monticello, Dec. 27, 1796.

My Dear Sir, — * * * You have seen my name lately tacked to so much of eulogy & of abuse, that I dare say you hardly thought it meant your old acquaintance of '76. In truth, I did not know myself under the pens either of my friends or foes. It is unfortunate for our peace, that unmerited abuse wounds, while unmerited praise has not the power to heal. These are hard wages for the services of all the active & healthy years of one's life. I had retired after five & twenty years of constant occupation in public affairs, and total abandonment of my own. I retired much poorer than when I entered the public service, and desired nothing but rest & oblivion. My name, however, was again brought forward, without concert or expectation on my part; (on my salvation I declare it.) I do not as yet know the result, as a matter of fact; for in my retired canton we have nothing later from Philadelphia than of the 2d week of this month. Yet I have never one moment doubted the result. I knew it was impossible mr. Adams should lose a vote North of the Delaware, and that the free and moral agency of the South would furnish him an abundant supplement. On principles of public respect I should not have refused; but I protest before my god, that I shall, from the bottom of my heart, rejoice at escaping. I know well that no man will ever bring out of that office the reputation which carries him into it. The honey moon would be as

short in that case as in any other, & its moments of extasy would be ransomed by years of torment & hatred. I shall highly value, indeed, the share which I may have had in the

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late vote, as an evidence of the share I hold in the esteem of my countrymen. But in this point of view, a few votes more or less will be little sensible, and in every other, the minor will be preferred by me to the major vote. I have no ambition to govern men; no passion which would lead me to delight to ride in a storm. *Flumina amo, sylvasque, inglorius*. My attachment to my home has enabled me to make the calculation with rigor, perhaps with partiality, to the issue which keeps me there. The newspapers will permit me to plant my corn, peas, &c., in hills or drills as I please (and my oranges, by-the-bye, when you send them), while our Eastern friend will be struggling with the storm which is gathering over us; perhaps be shipwrecked in it. This is certainly not a moment to covet the helm.

I have often doubted whether most to praise or to blame your line of conduct. If you had lent to your country the excellent talents you possess, on you would have fallen those torrents of abuse which have lately been poured forth on me. So far, I praise the wisdom which has descried & steered clear of a water-spout ahead. But now for the blame. There is a debt of service due from every man to his country, proportioned to the bounties which nature & fortune have measured to him. Counters will pay this from the poor of spirit; but from you, my friend, coin was due. There is no bankrupt law in heaven, by which

you may get off with shillings in the pound; with rendering to a single State what you owed to the whole confederacy. I think it was by the Roman law that a father was denied sepulture, unless his son would pay his debts. Happy for you & us, that you have a son whom genius & education have qualified to pay yours. But as you have been a good father in everything else, be so in this also. Come forward & pay your own debts. Your friends, the mr. Pinckneys, have at length undertaken their tour. My joy at this would be complete if you were in gear with them. I love to see honest and honorable men at the helm, men who will not bend their politics to their purses, nor pursue measures by which they may profit, & then profit by their measures. *Au diable les Bougres!* I am at the end of my curse and bottom of my page, so God bless you and yours. Adieu affectionately.